

CANOE FURNACE
(Soapfat Furnace)
On Township Run, North of PA 0866
Williamsburg Vicinity
Blair County
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-316

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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HAER No. PA-316

Location: On Township Run, .1 mile north of PA 0866, Williamsburg Vicinity, Blair County, Pennsylvania

Quad: Williamsburg, Pennsylvania

UTM: 17 E.7333650 N.448554017

Date of Construction: 1837

Builder: Henry S. Spang

Present Owner: unknown

Present Use: abandoned

Significance: Built by Henry S. Spang, who operated the nearby Etna Furnace. Spang also was associated with a large rolling mill in Pittsburgh. The Canoe Furnace is the only known surviving conically-shaped stone-constructed blast furnace in the region.

Historian: Nancy Shedd, 1987

Project Information:

The results of the study of Cambria County were published in 1990: Fitzsimons, Gray, editor, Blair County and Cambria County, Pennsylvania: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites (Washington, D.C.: America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP) and HABS/HAER, National Park Service). The contents of the publication were transmitted to the Library of Congress as individual reports. Research notes, field photos and copies of historic photos collected during the project were transmitted to the AIHP Collection, Special Collections, Stapleton Library, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA 15705.

HISTORY

In 1837 Henry S. Spang, owner and ironmaster at the Mt. Etna Iron Works, began the construction of a second furnace on the Pennsylvania Canal, the Canoe Furnace, also called the Soapfat Furnace. (According to local legend, the new furnace was labeled the Soapfat Furnace when an order of bacon, shipped to Spang's company store, was so rancid that workers reported it was unfit for consumption and good only for soap fat.) Spang's Canoe furnace was located on Township Run south of his ore mines on Short Mountain. It operated about ten years before it was blown out and then abandoned. By 1857 it was owned by Nett, Keller & Company but was going to ruin. The cold-blast machinery had been removed though the stack still remained.

The Canoe Furnace works originally included a head race extending from a dam above the furnace on Township Run powered the furnace's overshot wheel. Above the furnace, where the "Point View" Cottages are now located, stood a carriage house and stable, a large charcoal house, a blacksmith shop, and a storeroom and office. Across Township Run from the furnace, near a spring, Spang built a manager's house, of stone construction, on the hillside. Associated structures including a milk house, workers' housing and a schoolhouse/Sunday school were situated along Township Run. Although abandoned and partially collapsed, the furnace is still in fair condition. Canoe Furnace was one of the few conically shaped furnaces in Pennsylvania.

Sources

J.P. Lesley, The Iron Manufacturer's Guide to the Furnaces, Forges and Rolling Mills of the United States, New York: John Wiley, 1859.

Milton Burgess, "Old Manuscript Pictures: Historic Canoe Furnace," Morrison's Cove Herald, undated photocopy in the Williamsburg Historical Society Archives.

Myron B Sharp and William H. Thomas, A Guide to the Old Stone Blast Furnaces in Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh: The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, 1966.